

# RUSSO ▲ LEE GALLERY

## Exhibition Statement

### *Damascus: Mapping Place, Home and Exile*

So far, themes that are driving this work include the city of Damascus, Rumi's poetry, and the word *Viriditas*.

The city of Damascus was selected because it has meaning for me personally due to my own nomadic experience. Also, I was moved by my own state of despair as I witnessed from afar the current diaspora of the Syrian refugees. I felt compelled to look at maps that depicted the places they walked as they sought shelter in neighboring Jordan. Working with these maps triggered my own experience of being a foreigner, of being exiled.

Furthermore, I am incorporating these maps into my painting's surface as an empathetic gesture of kinship. Through painting I want to feel their tragic story, to somehow create a space for their suffering and connect with empathy to their despair. I want to address, in a very insufficient way, the question: What is the role of suffering? I want to face their suffering (and probably my own) and then surround it with life, with the greening of *Viriditas*, and with hope. I am motivated to paint the healing, the potential for transformation.

Reading the poems of Rumi before I begin painting helps to create an atmosphere and tone of poetic mystery and a sense of the Divine, a mood that I am trying to capture in this series. In contrast to the despair of Damascus is the theme of hope that *viriditas* represents. It does not point to an external geographic place; instead it describes a more interior phenomenon of "greening" with attributes like vitality and lushness, spiritual and physical health.

Although these worthy subjects drive the work, their remnants may not be visible to the viewer in the final abstract paintings. Damascus, maps, refugees, and *viriditas* are ideas that propel me into making. Their function is more peripheral; they provide a way for me to start a painting but the real magic only happens when my body engages with my materials - pigment, plaster, brush, tape, and canvas - it's that dance that opens the door to unknown possibilities.

Audrey Tulimiero Welch,, September 2021